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ABSTRACT

While management styles and theories differ among administrators of college radio stations, the views concerning the aspects of college radio, both on and off campus, tend to be consistent. Tendencies inherent to the administration of college radio stations are that: (1) college and university radio stations are operated in an on-going manner; (2) the full-time operation of college and university radio stations are run by part-time/volunteer staffs; (3) funding is limited; (4) the campus community continually makes demands on the station for coverage, but lacks the knowledge of the staffing, funding, and operational limitations of the station; (5) faculty advisors who oversee administration and operation of the stations provide needed continuity as student staffs change; (6) other faculty members continually make suggestions as to the operation and improvement of the station, but do not actually participate in the operation; (7) the local community is "confused" concerning the station; (8) the college will fully recognize the local commercial station for minimal coverage but seldom recognizes the campus station for its on-going coverage of school events; (9) the campus radio station and the campus newspapers face different obligations; and (10) station managers/advisors can use communication to foster harmony and agreement. (Contains 20 references.) (RS)

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College Radio: 10 Points of Contention from the Management Perspective

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Running Head: POINTS OF CONTENTION

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COLLEGE RADIO: 10 POINTS OF CONTENTION FROM THE MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

While management styles and theories differ among administrators of college radio stations, the views concerning the aspects of college radio, both on and off campus, tend to be consistent. This paper relates "generalizations" addressing the operation and management of college radio stations (which can also be applied to college operated television and cable outlets). Focusing on 10 points, this paper is a compilation of factors which have been viewed first-hand by the author as tendencies inherent to the administration of college radio stations.[1]

Point 1:

Auxiliary Enterprises

College and university radio stations are operated in an on-going manner.

Basically, these stations are run just like a business or "auxiliary enterprise" on campus in the sense that they are "service operations conducted to the benefit of students

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[1]It should be noted that since the author was in college radio station management for over 10 years, and having been associated with college radio in general for over 15 years, his bias leans towards viewing the management of such facilities from the "inside looking out."

and faculty" (Ohio House, 1969, p. 57). Furthermore, these stations exist to provide a service to the community through their broadcasts. In contrast to typical auxiliary enterprises operated on college or university campuses, however, noncommercial radio stations normally do not charge a "fee directly related to, although not necessarily equal to, the costs of the goods or services" (Hughes, 1980, p. 96). The campus radio station is typically funded directly by the school, either through direct funding or some type of student service fee allocation (see Point 3). In this aspect as an auxiliary enterprise, then, the noncommercial college and university station is completely controlled and funded by the individual institution and thus, the station's continuance, "expansion or curtailment does not require state approval nor are state funds made available for these purposes" (Ohio House, 1969, p. 57). However, even under such funding restraints, they are expected to function and operate in an on-going manner emulating their commercial counterparts. Thus, in reality, the campus radio station is a business operation. And while it is expected to function daily, it usually does so with reduced funding, staffing, and support when compared to most other entities on campus.

Point 2:

Staffing

The full-time operation of college and university radio stations are run by part-time/volunteer staffs.

"College radio is truly the training ground for tomorrow's broadcasters, providing the student an opportunity to practice techniques in broadcasting" (Sauls, 1995). "The traditional function of most campus radio stations has been to serve as a training ground for students who plan to enter professional broadcasting" (Smith, 1990, p. 17). The stations give students opportunities to work in a professional environment, make mistakes, and learn from their experiences. These stations are staffed by volunteer "non-professional" students, and/or skeleton part or full-time paid staff member(s). Basically, these are full-time entities operated by part-timers and volunteers. Here it must recognized that "because of their limited life experience, students may not always know the difference between promotion, public relations, and pressure (Holtermann, 1992)" from outside entities, particularly record promoters (Wilkinson, 1994). Here, then, station administration is critical.

To further the dilemma, as Gundersen noted in 1989, "[o]ne fourth of programmers graduate every year" (p. 5D). Of course, this provides campus radio with one of its unique

features -- their all different and constantly changing. As Ken Freedman, program director of WFMU, the Upsala College radio station in East Orange, N.J., said in 1987: " 'but at best, college radio allows each station to develop its own personality,'... [a]s for us, we're dedicated to diversity -- we're specializing in not specializing' " (Pareles, p. 18). The challenge is that of a constantly changing staff. Turnover is guaranteed!

Point 3:

Funding

The funding of college radio is limited.

Funding for college and university radio stations varies greatly, with the bulk traditionally coming from student fee support or general academic funds. In his book entitled The College Radio Handbook, Brant (1981) pointed out that "with few exceptions college radio stations are budgeted by the college or university to which they are licensed" (p. 82). Brant also noted that the few commercial stations licensed to educational institutions were able to seek potential advertisers (p. 84). Some of these stations, such as Howard University's WHUR-FM, have even achieved superiority ratings in major markets (Evans, 1986).

In 1979, Lucoff lamented that, while university administrators generally have little or no broadcasting

experience, they most often possess "control over funding" of campus radio stations (p. 26). In contrast, however, the National Association of Educational Broadcasters reported that 75% of the college and university educational radio stations responding to their 1967 study had only monthly or less frequent contact with the college or university as the licensee in the operation of the station (p. I-14). It is thus "hardly surprising to find a direct connection between budget size and the quality and extent of station programming" (p. I-8). Thus, it might be wise for those managing and advising such stations to communicate directly with school administrators who oversee funding. A little in-house "bragging" in regards to station potential on-campus can go a long way!

Of note, in 1995, the federal funding of the Corporation of Public Broadcasting (CPB) was under congressional scrutiny. A good number of college radio and television stations are National Public Radio (NPR) or Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) affiliates which rely on CPB funds (Petrozzello, 1995). It is possible, therefore, that a reduction of such federal funding could impact campus radio programming and support.

Point 4:

Demands on the Station

The campus community continually makes demands on the station for coverage, but lacks the knowledge of the staffing, funding, and operation limitations of the station itself.

Not to be confused with the local community (which is addressed in Point 7), the campus community can have great expectations of what the campus station should be doing. These expectations are from the administration, to athletics, to academic units, to faculty, and, of course, to students. Everyone on campus has a justifiable vision of what the campus radio station should be doing. What everyone does not realize are the limited resources (financial, physical, and staff) which the campus station operates within. Additionally, it is the intrinsic responsibility of the radio station itself, under the direction of its management, to determine its purpose. "As a result, it is [sometimes] necessary to choose certain types of programs as more desirable than others" (WSRN, 1991). Outside of direct programming control by the school and/or an academic unit, the station itself must determine its direction and provide the necessary continuity to carry out its stated mission. It should then communicate its purpose to the campus and the local community.

Point 5:

The Faculty Advisor

Station faculty managers/advisors and the co-curricular tie with courses and academics).

Because most campus radio stations are under the auspices of an academic department within the college or university, the presence of the station can compliment actual coursework. The stations are generally supervised by a faculty advisor or staff manager who oversees the administration and operation of the station on a day-to-day basis, providing needed continuity as student staffs change year to year (Sauls, 1995). Thompsen wrote in 1992 that "a faculty advisor can be a driving force in shaping a vision for the station, the reasons for its existence" (p. 14). Such demands of station administration and supervision of a faculty advisor are normally in addition to their normal workload requirements of teaching, research, and service. Because of the relationship between the station advisor and academic department it must be recognized that "financial resources and operating procedures are almost entirely determined by the academic missions of the department" (Ozier, 1978, p. 34). The findings of studies reflect the important association between academic programs and the funding and purposes of college radio (see Sauls, 1993).

Point 6:

The Other Faculty

Other faculty members continually make suggestions as to the operation and improvement of the station, but do not actually participate in the operation.

A natural problem within academic departments is that, while under the best intentions, recommendations on how to "run the station" from those not directly involved are not always welcomed. The manager or faculty advisor quite often views these suggestions as negative criticism. Additionally, many times the manager/advisor sees themselves as the only one participating from the department in the operation of the station. So, the manager/advisor's internal response to such recommendations is "if you want to change the station, why don't you come help me!"[2]

Point 7:

The Local Community

The local community is "confused" concerning the station.

Overall, as with commercial stations, the underlying premise of the college radio station is to serve the

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[2]It should be again pointed out that the author's bias leans towards viewing the management of college radio from the manager/advisor's perspective.

community, whether it be the campus community or the community at large, but in unique ways often geared to underserved niches of the population. This ideal is consistent with the fact that colleges and universities are licensed to "operate broadcast facilities in the public interest, convenience, and necessity" (Ozier, 1978, p. 34). Studies indicate that this service component to the community is important (see Sauls, 1993). Scott Frampton, editor in chief of the CMJ New Music Monthly Journal (a college radio trade magazine), said that "[c]ollege radio is providing a service to the community, providing programming you can't get anywhere else on the dial. It should be more than just the campus jukebox" (McDonald, 1995, p. 21).

"... [N]early all stations see their primary function as one of providing alternative programming to their listening audiences. ... More specifically, the alternative programming is primarily made up of three types: entertainment, information, and instruction" (Caton, 1979, p. 9). "College radio is as varied as college towns or college students" (Pareles, 1987, p. 18). Some stations mirror commercial radio, while others opt to develop their own style.

Since the community does not understand the operation of the station, recognition of the station is sometimes not properly given. Additionally, demands put on the station

are sometimes unrealistic or misleading since the community does not know how the station functions. Broadcast requests made by outside sources are often beyond the scope of the intended purpose of the campus station. Then, the community confuses the campus station with commercial stations to the extent of crediting the wrong station (see Point 8).

Point 8:

The Commercial Outlet

The college or university will fully recognize the local commercial outlet for minimal coverage, but seldom recognizes the campus station for on-going coverage of school events.

The on-going broadcasts provided by college radio help to serve as public relations arms for the schools themselves. Often college radio stations are the only outlets for such broadcasts as campus sports and news. In regard to the colleges' and universities' perceptions of college radio, one advantage is that the institutional image is enhanced every time a well-programmed station identifies itself as affiliated with the school (Sauls, 1995). Here the station should be credited by the school. But, at times, for whatever reason, many campus stations go unrecognized. For example, the campus station will provide complete football broadcasts while the local commercial

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radio outlet will give only limited coverage. But, the school will fully credit the commercial station for its efforts, while not recognizing the campus station. This tends to give the campus station staff (usually students) a negative impression for their efforts.

Point 9:

The campus radio station versus the campus newspaper.

The campus newspaper is just that -- a "campus" outlet. The campus newspaper is more "visible" than the radio station. The campus newspaper has no on-going obligation to the local community, as does the campus radio station, so it can stop printing during school break periods. The campus newspaper can rely heavily upon journalism students for "beat" reporters. Most importantly, the campus radio station must recognize its responsibilities as being a federally licensed agent of the school. Therefore, the campus radio station must meet minimum obligations as not to jeopardize its continued authorization to operate.

Note: Interestingly, the campus newspaper is often referred to as the "student newspaper," while the campus radio station is referred to as the "school station." So the terms "student" versus "school" exist?

Point 10:

Communicating

While use of the phrase "points of contention" would tend to postulate a negative approach, this final point highlights what can be done to counter some of the dissenting aspects which have been brought forth in this paper. For those who direct the "student staffs" of college and university radio stations, the following ideals (each involving some type of communication) are put forth to foster harmony and agreement.

The manager/advisor must have an understanding of student limitations. These students are individuals who may never have been in a station until they walked into the campus radio station. Quoting Dr. Roosevelt Wright, Jr., a professor at Syracuse's Newhouse School of Public Communications in the radio/television/film sequence:

> Students have to be able to make mistakes. ... The college or university provides an ample opportunity for a person to make those mistakes. Having been a broadcaster myself--and a person who's owned broadcast properties and managed them--usually we don't have time to train someone in the industry. (Chichester, p. 62)

It's not that the manager/advisor is encouraging a lesser quality of work by the students themselves, but rather is tolerant of expected errors and blunders. Most importantly,

the supervisor must accept the fact that the same mistakes will made over and over again as staffs rotate (see Point 2). What seems obvious to those with years of experience in the industry, is something completely new for the student novice.

Always strive to be positive, even in the worst of times. Students tend to emulate those who direct them. Bad attitudes will only serve to create negative feelings. No matter what happens (even if the radio station catches fire!), always try to communicate the positive.

Do your best to create a professional atmosphere. If the student staff is placed in a professional operation, their performance will be of a professional nature. At the same time though, be sure to allow enjoyment and experimentation.

Give responsibility in order to further nurture the creative activity. Remember that students are on campus (and at the campus station) to learn. But, they must be given the opportunity to do their job at the station. It is the station manager's job to manage and advise, while letting the student staff run the station.

Many of the "problem areas" addressed in this paper can be curtailed somewhat through ample and appropriate communication. Confusion over needs, wants, and desires of the college radio station are often the result of inadequate

or misleading information. The more enlightened the station student staff and outsiders (both on and off campus) are as to the operation of the station, the more they will be able to comprehend the manager/advisor's stated purposes and intended actions. By communicating information appropriately, the station manager/advisor might find themselves conveying more and justifying less.

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